

Dress For Interview Success

While the college campus may be the perfect forum in which to exhibit your flair for the latest in fashion style, the interview is not the place to do so. With very few unusual exceptions (my apologies to Apple Computer), sandals and sweatshirts are out. Oxfords and business suits are still in. I don't like a necktie (noose?) any better than the next person, but it is still a fact of life in interviewing. Even though many companies have relaxed the internal company dress code, interviews still follow the conservative standard. Don't buck the trend.

Unfortunately, most college grads are woefully underprepared with proper interview dress. They feel they can "get by" with what is already in their wardrobe. Usually not. Dress for the world outside college is quite different from the campus scene. Remember that stylish is not conservative. You should be doing the talking, not your clothes.

This is not to say that you need to go out and buy a whole new wardrobe. Go for quality over quantity. One or two well-chosen business suits will serve you all the way to the first day on the job and beyond. Then, when you are making some money (and have a chance to see what the standard "uniform" is for the company), you can begin to round out your wardrobe. For now, no one will fault you for wearing the same sharp outfit each time you interview. If you desire some variety within a limited budget, you might consider varying your shirt/blouse/tie/accessories as a simple way to change your look without breaking your wallet.

For those of you who need a quick review of the basics, follow these guidelines for successful interview dress:

Men and Women

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark blue or grey is best)
- Conservative long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets--no bulges or tinkling coins
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- Light briefcase or portfolio case
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

Men

- Necktie should be silk with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes (black lace-ups are best)
- Dark socks (black is best)
- Get a haircut; short hair always fares best in interviews
- No beards (unless you are interviewing for a job as a lumberjack!)
- Mustaches are a possible negative, but if you must, make sure it is neat and trimmed
- No rings other than wedding ring or college ring
- No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out)

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Women

- Always wear a suit with a jacket; no dresses
- Shoes with conservative heels
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (and no runs!)
- No purses, small or large; carry a briefcase instead
- If you wear nail polish (not required), use clear or a conservative color
- Minimal use of makeup (it should not be too noticeable)
- No more than one ring on each hand
- One set of earrings only

If you are still unsure about the specifics, check out a copy of John Molloy's [New Dress for Success](#) or [New Women's Dress for Success](#). While these books may seem to have a rather conservative slant, it is the norm in most of the professional marketplace. It is almost always better to be higher than the standard than lower.

If you are still not sure how to dress for the interview, call them and ask! That's right--call the employer. But this is one time when you do not want to call the Hiring Manager--instead, ask to be put through to Human Resources and say:

"I have an interview with _____ in the _____ department for a position as an _____. Could you please tell me what would be appropriate dress for this interview?"

Sure, you run the risk of someone in HR thinking you are a social imbecile, but that's a lot better than having the Hiring Manager distracted by inappropriate interview dress.

While many work environments have shifted to business casual as the work standard, business suits are still the interview standard. When in doubt, it is almost always better to err on the side of conservatism.

One final note on interview dress: while it goes without saying that your interview clothes should be neat and clean, very few interviewees give the same time and attention to their shoes. Shoes? Yes, shoes. I am aware of at least one Corporate Recruiter who forms first impressions based solely (pardon the pun) on shoes. This person does not have a shoe fetish--he subjectively judges that those who pay attention to details like their shoes are also likely to be diligent in their work life. And it is not just that person's opinion. Many have said that you can judge a person by their shoes. You will find that many ex-military officers (many of whom have found their way into management positions in corporate America) are especially aware of a person's shoes. It is not enough to be clean, pressed, and ironed. Make sure your shoes are conservative, clean, and polished.